

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

August 22, 2023

The Honorable Miguel A. Cardona
Secretary, Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary Cardona,

As leaders of the bipartisan, bicameral Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus (CSC), one of the largest and most active caucuses on Capitol Hill, we write to express concern with how the Department of Education (Department) is interpreting certain language contained within the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA). We request that the Department revisit the legislative intent of the BSCA and reissue guidance so as not to exclude archery programs, hunter education classes, wilderness and outdoor classes, and school sponsored target shooting teams from federal education funding. This reissuance will ensure that millions of students and families across the country are not unintentionally impacted by a misinterpretation of the BSCA statute that is inconsistent with the intent of Congress.

Specifically, we are concerned with how "dangerous weapon" under Section 13401 of the BSCA has been interpreted by the Department. By using the plain definition of "dangerous weapon" as defined in section 930(g)(2) of title 18, U.S.C., the Department is threatening the future of longstanding educational and development programs within school systems such as in-school archery programs, hunter education classes, wilderness and outdoor classes, and school sponsored target shooting teams. As schools around the country are set to return from summer break, it is critical to address this interpretation before these important programs are delayed or cancelled for the school year.

As you are aware, Section 13401 of the BSCA amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 by adding training in the use of a "dangerous weapon" under the prohibited use of funds section for ESEA. Importantly, the legislative intent of this language was not to prohibit the use of ESEA funds for critical life skill programs like archery, hunter education, and wilderness classes. Rather, the intent of amending ESEA to include "dangerous weapon" was to ensure that ESEA funds would remain true to their intent to enhance and support enrichment programs that serve as invaluable opportunities for students from all walks of life. The BSCA provided funding for training school personnel in other areas of the legislation to make certain that ESEA funds were not used for such purposes, but again, this was not designed to interrupt or prohibit ESEA funds for valuable programs that benefit students.

Unfortunately, by misinterpreting the legislative intent of the BSCA, the Department will soon negatively impact millions of students across the country. These programs are popular among teachers and school personnel because success in archery, hunting, target shooting, and outdoor classes can be achieved by students of all genders, abilities, and backgrounds. Further, according to teachers engaged with these programs, student participation has been correlated with improvements in academic

performance, behavior, and school attendance. In the case of school sponsored archery programs, such as the National Archery in the Schools Programs, there are more than 1.3 million students in nearly 9,000 schools across 49 states that participate each academic year.

We also point out that this misinterpretation will undermine opportunities to teach hunter education courses that have been credited with reducing fatalities and injuries in hunting by more than 80 percent since 1959. These programs provide unique opportunities for students to build camaraderie, learn responsibility, improve mental health, and develop important life skills, all while being introduced with the safe, responsible, and legal handling of a firearm or archery equipment.

Again, we strongly encourage the Department to revisit the legislative intent of the BSCA and revise the interpretation to exclude programs such as archery in schools, hunter education, school sponsored target shooting teams, wilderness classes, and other activities that are critical to providing outdoor opportunities for students. We look forward to working with you to safeguard the future of these time-honored activities.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Co-Chair
Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus



Jimmy Panetta
Co-Chair
Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus



Garret Graves
Vice-Chair
Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus



Jared Golden
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